

For the defeat of terrorism

By ABDULLAHI AN-NA`IM - Special to The Kansas City Star

Date: 09/20/01 22:15

The ultimate object of terrorism, in all its forms and from whatever source it may come, is to diminish our humanity and reduce us to its own level of barbarity.

To defeat that evil purpose and enact our categorical condemnation of the horrendous atrocities of Sept. 11, we must reflect on our own enlightened and humane best interest in the face of such grotesque behavior.

Since simple retaliation will only feed into a spiral of mutual destruction, we have to strive to understand and address possible causes of what appears to be utterly senseless carnage, however alien and incomprehensible that may be to our own rationality.

In my view, the profound moral and political failure of American policy in the Middle East is the most serious and direct threat to the same economic and security interests that are cited in rationalization of that policy.

To put it bluntly, unprincipled and unjust foreign policy undermines the business and security interests of the United States everywhere. That self-defeating policy will end only when the American public cares enough to hold its own government accountable for its actions abroad as it is at home.

The worst failure of the U.S. policy in the Middle East is its unconditional and uncritical support of whatever Israel does. Israeli armed forces killed several thousand during its illegal invasion and occupation of parts of Lebanon for 18 years.

Yet the United States blocked every international effort to force Israel to withdraw, let alone holding its leaders accountable for those crimes. In contrast, the United States and its Western allies continue to punish the people of Iraq for the sins of their

oppressors, who did to Kuwait what Israel was still doing to Lebanon at the time.

Another failure is the unqualified support of the corrupt and oppressive regime of Saudi Arabia that is the primary source of militant fundamentalism in the Muslim world.

Recall that U.S. suppression of the liberal democratic process in Iran in 1952 and support for the shah's regime as a Cold War strategy begot Ayatollah Khomeini by 1979.

Our condemnation of the horrendous atrocities of Sept. 11 can only be vindicated by breaking the chain of caution of international terrorism, instead of launching our own terrorist retaliation.

American business and security can be permanently secured only through promoting the rule of law and international cooperation to combat all evil in the world, whatever its source and alleged justification may be.

Failure to hold our own government accountable for its actions abroad makes us as bigoted and chauvinistic as the terrorists we condemn and seek to punish.

Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im is the Charles Howard Candler professor of law at Emory University School of Law in Atlanta. He wrote this article for The Kansas City Star. He was to speak Thursday at the University of Kansas by invitation of the African Studies Center.

<http://www.kcstar.com/item/pages/opinion.pat,opinion/3accfdd6.920.html>